

Report to COUNCIL (1 November 2023)

Cabinet Report of Housing and Licensing Portfolio

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Elaine Taylor,
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Licensing

This report provides an update on the main activity since the last Council meeting relating to portfolio responsibilities.

Housing and Homelessness

The demand for the homelessness service continues to increase. Approximately 630 residents per month are approaching the homelessness service for assistance. Similarly, residents needing assistance with temporary accommodation continues to increase, with 470 households currently being housed in temporary accommodation. The number of residents applying to the Council's Housing Register also continues to increase and to help demonstrate the size and scale of the issue – at the end of September, there were over 7,600 households on the register seeking accommodation with less than 330 properties available.

While acknowledging these challenges, the Council continues to review the level of service being provided to help the huge numbers of residents in need of housing support. A new IT system is being developed to reduce the amount of paperwork involved and support residents to access the Housing Register in a more effective way. We are also undertaking a review of staffing capacity, casework demand and systems and processes compared to other local authorities across Greater Manchester to understand if there are any other areas of best practice that we can adopt at this critical time. The team in Access Oldham continues to support residents, but the number of people coming through the door for assistance continues to grow, with approximately 85 residents attending daily for housing support and advice.

Given the complex escalation of housing demands in Oldham – the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are coming to do a deep dive to review the procurement and management of temporary accommodation. This will provide the Council with an opportunity to outline directly to government officers what the key challenges and issues are affecting Oldham's residents and the impact on service provision. We hope this will highlight the need for extra assistance in order to alleviate this demand led service.

Housing Quality and Enforcement

The Environmental Health team are responsible for housing standards enforcement in the private rented sector, and also carry out proactive condition audits in properties in Selective Licensing areas. Where there are defects identified that require the landlord to take action, the team will inform the landlord and take enforcement action where appropriate.

The team are receiving an average of 70 requests a month from tenants who are experiencing disrepair issues in their home including damp and mould. It is expected there will be an increase of requests regarding excess cold, damp and mould during the winter months. The Council has provided information on the website to advise tenants and landlords about the steps they can take to help mitigate these issues: https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/100007/housing/2896/mould_and_damp_in_the_home

The team has recently increased capacity to help meet the existing and anticipated increase in challenges associated with housing quality and standards.

Landlord Licensing:

The Selective Licensing scheme, approved in July 2022, is currently being delivered in specific neighbourhoods across Oldham. There have been 492 applications received from private landlords with 332 licenses granted and 131 condition audits of licensed properties completed.

The Council has been successful in attracting an additional £75,000 from Greater Manchester Combined Authority to consult and implement the next targeted private landlord selective licensing scheme using the new delegated powers from central Government. This work is due to commence soon, starting with a detailed data analysis to help identify potential areas ahead of any community consultation.

Planning:

The Planning Inspectorate have independently examined the Joint Development Plan, Places for Everyone (PfE) for nine Greater Manchester Local Authorities, and the Inspectors have made some modifications to the plan to make it sound and legally compliant. At this point in time, Oldham residents, businesses, landowners and developers are being asked for their views on the proposed modifications to the Plan.

The consultation on the modifications will run for 8 weeks, between 11 October 2023 and 6 December 2023. Views can be submitted by completing the online response form: [Modifications - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/modifications) or you can download the response form from the GMCA PfE website and email the completed form to: placesforeveryone@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk.

Trading Standards and Licensing:

On 6th June 2023, members approved a revised policy which addressed concerns raised by the taxi trade relating to additional requirements which were causing applicants to licence their taxis outside of the Borough.

These changes are the first step in acknowledging and reacting to the modernisation of the taxi trade and how it operates. The changes are a positive reflection of collaborative working between Licensing Officers and taxi trade representatives. It has led to an increase in new driver applications, with a total of 1,129 received as of 23rd October. 291 of which have already been issued with licences.

Further trade engagement has taken place around vehicle testing and a report was presented to the Licensing Committee on 31st October with proposals to amend the policy, including increasing the vehicle age limit, issuing MOT Certificates as part of the annual vehicle test and creating a simplified and accessible testing criteria document to assist the trade in meeting our expected compliance requirements.

Tobacco & Vape Enforcement:

The local authority has a statutory duty to enforce legislation in respect of illegal tobacco and non-compliant vapes. Illicit tobacco is often linked to other criminality, including serious

organised crime. However, it is a growing concern for the Council's Trading Standards as it is currently a cheap option for children and young people to start smoking as it erodes the cost motivation to quit.

Illegal vapes are often designed and flavoured to appeal to young people and available at 'pocket money' prices. Whilst the risk that legal vapes present is known, the risk of harm from non-compliant vapes is not. The Trading Standards team is continuing to work with partners such as GMP, HMRC and Oldham Tobacco Alliance to crack down on illegal vapes. Last month, Trading Standards, assisted by GMP, seized £27,000 worth of illegal tobacco and vapes with further legal action to follow.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.